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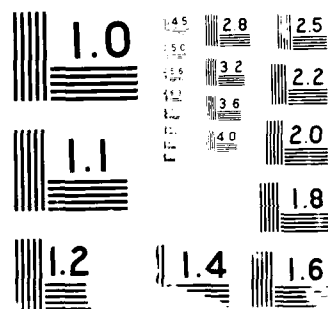
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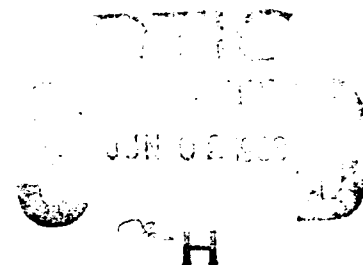
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STUDENT REPORT

BOOK ANALYSIS: A GENIUS FOR WAR, THE GERMAN
ARMY AND GENERAL STAFF, 1807-1945

MAJOR DANIEL L. GLADMAN

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"insights into tomorrow"



REPORT NUMBER 88-1035

TITLE BOOK ANALYSIS: A GENIUS FOR WAR, THE GERMAN ARMY AND GENERAL STAFF, 1807-1945

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Submitted to the faculty in partial fulfillment of
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PREFACE

In analyzing Colonel T. N. Dupuy's A Genius for War, The German Army and General Staff, 1807-1945 (referenced hereafter as A Genius for War), the author sought to discover if Dupuy provides the reader with a comprehensive, accurate, and unbiased look at the German Army and General Staff. This determination would then allow an assessment of the relative merit of the book as a useful tool for the study of the effectiveness of the German Army and General Staff.

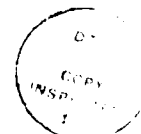
In his analysis, the author attempted to look at factors in Dupuy's background which may have influenced his writings. This search for bias and accompanying assessment of credibility included a look at selected book reviews in an effort to discover if Dupuy's writings are generally regarded as comprehensive and unbiased. The author then sought to compare Dupuy's writings and assessment of the effectiveness of the German General Staff with those of other respected historians. The author's organizational pattern was thus established as he sought to achieve the above objectives.

Chapter One is a brief chronological synopsis of A Genius For War, which provides the reader with a summary of Dupuy's chronology and establishes a foundation for the analysis.

Chapter Two features biographical information on Dupuy along with extracts of selected reviews of Dupuy's writings. The chapter also includes a subjective assessment of the general quality of Dupuy's extensive works.

Chapter Three is an assessment and analysis of Dupuy's book. The chapter evaluates the key points in Dupuy's book by comparing his assertions with those of other authors who have written on the same subject.

In Chapter Four, the concluding chapter, the author provides a subjective answer to the central theme and question generated by Dupuy's book: Did the German's find the secret of "institutionalizing" military excellence? Finally, the chapter briefly assesses the merit of the book as an unbiased analysis of the German Army and General Staff.





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For the first half of this century, German militarism and German military excellence, both real and perceived, played a significant role in shaping European and world affairs. During this period, German military capability was respected and feared. This remained true, even following the First World War, when German military strength was limited by the Treaty of Versailles to an army of 100,000 men.

During the late stages of the Second World War, after the Allies had amassed vast numerical superiority in men and weapons, allied commanders retained their respect for the effective and cohesive professional fighting force they faced. Only after achieving overwhelming advantages in numbers, intelligence, and firepower, could the Allies be reasonably confident of success. Without this tremendous superiority, American and British ground force commanders knew their men were likely to be defeated. Why did these German armies fight so well?

Colonel T. N. Dupuy, an experienced military historian, identifies five possible explanations for German military excellence: genetic superiority, inherent adaptability to military life,

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desperation at the prospect of defeat, a cultural pattern giving dominance to military activity, and the development of more effective military institutions than other countries. Dupuy dismisses the first four as being without basis and settles on the fifth--the German General Staff--as the explanation for German military excellence.

Dupuy then provides the reader with a chronology of the evolution and development of the German Army and General Staff from 1807-1945 by discussing the significant events and actors during the period. In his book, Dupuy contends the German's "institutionalized" military excellence through their General Staff system, and he demonstrates how the General Staff contributed to the effective performance of the German Army. However, the fourth factor, German culture, which Dupuy unfortunately dismisses, may have as much to do with explaining German military excellence as does the institution upon which Dupuy bases his thesis. The contribution of German cultural factors (which manifest themselves in unique behavioral patterns and attitudes) to German military excellence is too significant to ignore.

The text, containing numerous generalizations and assumptions on German military excellence, fails to provide the reader with the specifics on the General Staff or on Staff Officer training the book leads one to expect. Dupuy never really defines "institutionalized excellence," its character, or even how, specifically, it was achieved. He also fails to describe the level of military excellence achieved by the Germans. The Germans consistently attained both operational and tactical excellence; however, their failures in strategic planning and their lack of appreciation for the strategic significance of air and sea power fall far short of "institutionalized excellence". Such generalizations regarding "excellence" without precise definitions and specific explanations of how and at what level "institutionalized excellence" was achieved diminish the book's value to the serious student of military history.

Despite these shortcomings, the book provides an interesting look at the German Army and General Staff. In all fairness, it is, of course, impossible to capture all the details of a 150-

Chapter One

Dupuy is convinced the Germans, through their General Staff, were able to "institutionalize" military excellence. He uses a chronological approach, beginning with a brief discussion of Frederick the Great and the Prussian Army and the events leading up to the reforms of 1807 under Scharnhorst, to introduce and advance his thesis. Dupuy, unfortunately, never really defines "institutionalized excellence," its character, or how, specifically, it was achieved. Instead, he provides a chronology of the German Army and General Staff from 1807-1945. He focuses on campaigns and discusses and interprets various strategic plans rather than describing exactly how General Staff officers were selected and trained. More importantly, Dupuy fails to address two key questions: Why did the Germans create such an effective military institution? What was the special character of, and, at what level--strategic, operational, or tactical--did the Germans achieve institutionalized excellence? Since Dupuy leaves these questions unanswered, the reader will find the following synopsis also lacking in specifics as it provides a parallel summary of the history presented by Dupuy. Specific comments on Dupuy's support of his thesis are the subject of the assessment and analysis in Chapter Three.

Let us begin now, as Dupuy did, by looking at the reformers and their new army.

The Reformers and Their New Army

Following the disastrous and crushing defeats at the hands of Napoleon, King Frederick William of Prussia appointed Major General Scharnhorst as head of the Military Reorganization Commission. The Commission was tasked with rebuilding and reorganizing the Prussian Army (2:20). Known to German history as the "Reformers," the Commission included Scharnhorst, Gneisenau, Grolman, Boyen, and Clausewitz (2:22-23). "Scharnhorst and his companions decided Prussia needed a system under which--insofar as was humanly possible--the Prussian Army would be created by organizational genius and led in battle by operational genius" (2:24). Thus, with the goal of "institutionalized military excellence," the Army General Staff concept was born. "The General Staff, as the reformers visualized it, would be a collection of the best and most experienced minds in the entire Army" (2:28).

The Commission established a national conscription system and mobilization procedures while opening the officer ranks to the

of Moltke and others who Dupuy attributes as being products of a system established to develop and promote "military excellence." The formalization of "Kriegsspiel", or war gaming, and such innovative practices as staff rides to study the terrain where a battle might be fought, along with the training discussed above, all contributed, Dupuy believes, to the successful institutionalization of excellence.

The Prussian Army and General Staff: Mid-century

Moltke, as discussed earlier, reorganized the General Staff in 1858-59. He established four planning divisions (2:65). However, with the exception of the newly formed Railways Department, the staff remained organized in departments which focused on various geographic regions.

The most significant aspect of the reorganization was perhaps Moltke's ability to foresee the potential contribution of railways in both mobilization and wartime logistics support. Thus, the reorganization refined the "institution" rather than changing its basic structure.

Moltke's rail mobilization plans were tested in the mobilization for the Franco-Austrian War in 1859 (which ended without Prussian intervention), and again during large scale exercises in 1862 (2:66-67). The General Staff continued to refine its plans and procedures during brief territorial disputes with Denmark (over Holstein) and again with the Austrians in 1866. In June 1866, the King "issued a brief but momentous order. Until further notice, the Chief of the General Staff was authorized to issue orders directly to units of the Prussian Army, without the delay of getting the approval of either the King or War Minister" (2:79). The war with Austria, ending in a decisive Prussian victory, had brought new power to the General Staff.

The Franco-Prussian War

Following the War, the General Staff studied the lessons of the conflict with Austria. "Moltke in particular was chagrined by his failure to use the Prussian cavalry properly" (2:89). Intent on learning from its mistakes, the staff went to work in updating doctrine and correcting deficiencies discovered in weapons and artillery. Once again, Moltke reorganized and refined the "institution of excellence"--the General Staff. He established a mission-oriented Main Establishment which consisted of geographical mission-related departments similar to those discussed earlier and a Supporting Establishment with five departments including Military History. Due to the refinement of the General Staff, doctrine, and equipment, Dupuy contends the outcome of the Franco-Prussian war was never in doubt (2:97). French defeat, Dupuy argues, was assured "by the consistently superior quality of Prussian Staff work, and the general superiority of Prussian leadership--all due, directly and without

Germany" (2:130). Schlieffen believed a small German force could hold off the Russians due to their slow mobilization plan while the bulk of the German Army would be thrown against France before the French could mobilize. The plan, emphasizing speed and maneuver, "would seek to destroy the French armies and capture Paris so quickly that Britain would not intervene in the war"--or at least before that intervention could be effective (2:130-131).

Dupuy argues the Schlieffen Plan, the conceptual basis for the German war plan at the outbreak of World War I, suffered more from a failure of execution than of planning. The plan, which has been extensively studied, will not be discussed in great detail in this analysis. However, it is important to emphasize the key points made by Dupuy in supporting his thesis.

The plan, as envisioned by Schlieffen, "called for a 7-to-1 ratio of German forces north of Metz compared to those in the south" (2:138). However, the younger Moltke, Schlieffen's successor who became Chief of Staff in 1906, reduced the German right wing to approximately a 2-to-1 ratio over the left. Dupuy asserts this "watering-down" of the Plan by the cautious Moltke doomed it to failure. Dupuy contends "the Schlieffen plan, as originally conceived, "was viable and well within the performance capability of the German combat forces and logistical support services" (2:145).

The stalemate that followed the failure of Moltke's revised Schlieffen Plan is discussed in some detail by Dupuy. His assertions regarding the performance of the German Army during WWI will be discussed in Chapter Three. Dupuy also discusses the development by the Germans of the "defense-in-depth" concept and the Hutier offensive tactics which relied on surprise and bypassing enemy strong points as evidence of General Staff ingenuity.

Dupuy presents numerous statistics as he strives to support his thesis of "institutionalized military excellence." During World War I, Dupuy argues, "the Germans mobilized 11 million men and suffered approximately 6 million casualties. Against Germany alone, the allies mobilized nearly 28 million men and suffered approximately 12 million casualties. Thus, on the average, each mobilized German soldier killed or wounded slightly more than one allied soldier; it took five allied soldiers to incapacitate one German" (2:177). Germany, despite this apparent excellence on the battlefield, had suffered a terrible defeat. The harsh terms of the Treaty of Versailles mandated the dismantling of the German Army and the "institution of excellence," the General Staff.

Post-WWI and the Clandestine Recovery

In the turmoil following the armistice, Dupuy characterized the Army as "the one solid element around which a new nation

Dupuy asserts that in addition to covertly restoring formal military education and the examination process for potential General Staff officers, Seeckt had restored the German Army's reputation as the finest in the world. In addition, he had "on several occasions saved the nation from political chaos" (2:219-221). And, finally, under General von Seeckt, the self-perpetuating institution of excellence--the General Staff--was restored.

Hitler and the General Staff

Dupuy states "the General Staff as an institution, while opposed to the restrictions of the Versailles Treaty and favoring the rearmament of Germany, was almost continuously in opposition to Hitler on most other issues of military policy and strategy from 1933 onward" (2:223). Dupuy summarizes Hitler's rise to power while pointing out Kurt von Schleicher's role (Chief of the Political Division of the General Staff) in Hitler's rise to power. Dupuy contends Schleicher's support of Hitler was unintentional (2:223).

He supports this theme with examples such as Groener's concern for the rising Nazi menace while Minister of Defense in 1930. Groener urged all officers to avoid involvement in politics, writing that the soldier's duty was to "serve the state--far from all party politics" (2:227). Dupuy characterizes the views of General von Fritsch, appointed Chief of the Army Command in 1934 as typical: "most of the German Generals felt they had it in their power to terminate Hitler's regime, should they ever deem it necessary" (2:234). Thus, the institution of excellence strove to remain apolitical while supporting rearmament.

In early 1935, Hitler denounced the Versailles Treaty's armament limitations and announced plans for increasing the Army to 36 divisions, some 550,000 men. Beck, appointed Chief of Staff in 1934, strongly opposed this plan. He favored a gradual growth to 21 divisions (300,000 men) so that the quality of the Army could be maintained. Hitler made it very clear to Beck and the other officers present what he thought of the time-consuming General Staff officer training process. "Any good Nazi, he insisted, would automatically be a good combat leader through his fanatic, patriotic zeal" (2:236-237).

Dupuy discusses the rapid growth of the 100,000-man Army to Hitler's mandated strengths. He looks at the roles of Fromm as Chief of the General Army Office responsible for force development, organization and armament; and he describes the growth and development of the Panzer force under Lutz and his Chief of Staff, Guderian (2:236-241).

Dupuy characterizes the General Staff's reaction to Hitler's plan for the occupation of the Rhineland, and later of Austria, as one of initial disapproval, followed by grudging respect for

plot against Hitler, and Guderian's tenure as Chief of the General Staff. Dupuy characterizes Guderian as "a brilliant combat commander but--an unexceptional staff officer who lacked the intellectual capacity for high command" (2:280). Dupuy contends the excellence, so obvious in the early successes, continued in 1944 as the German Army staved off defeat in the face of overwhelming Allied strength. The German Army's performance, he argues, was commendable to the end--"despite repeated catastrophes, it remained cohesive and fought effectively until overrun" (2:298).

The Institution of Excellence

In closing his book, Dupuy attempts to balance his assessment of German performance by pointing out some of the deficiencies in the German strategic planning process. In discussing World War II, he points out the "inability of the Germans to grasp the strategic implications of air power," and, he contends, "sea power was ignored" (2:290-291). "The inability to effect a satisfactory relationship with civilian authority was, of course, extremely significant in the prosecution of the war" (2:291). Hitler, overruling the General Staff, ordered dispersed offensives on the Russian front that ultimately led to disaster (2:295). This is, of course, only one example of Hitler's interference in the formulation of military strategy.

Despite these weaknesses, Dupuy believes the performance of the General Staff and the Army it built during both world wars "was comparable in terms of military excellence to Napoleon and Hannibal at their best. Perhaps, in this sense, it is not too much to say that in striving to institutionalize excellence in military affairs, the German General Staff can be said to have institutionalized military genius itself" (2:299). In a system built on selection, examination, and specialized training, within a society known for its regimentation; it is interesting to note the one aspect of military performance, emphasized more than any other in German military training, was "individual initiative" (2:304).

Dupuy, obviously impressed with the German General Staff System, believes the system warrants study for possible application to our own Army. In Chapter Three, we will look at Dupuy's support of his thesis and compare his assessments of the German General Staff with those of other historians. Did the Germans, as Dupuy believes, find the secret of institutionalizing military excellence?

An analysis of reviews of Colonel T. N. Dupuy's writings reveals an interesting fact. The early texts Dupuy completed with his father, R. Ernest Dupuy, are generally regarded as good, while his individual efforts tend to lack the depth and support characteristic of the earlier works he completed while writing with his father. Typical of reviews of their collective efforts are the following comments on World War II: A Compact History, taken from the 1970 issue of Book Review Digest. "This book is a good outline history of the war for the General Reader," and "The author writes with gusto about the war . . . Here and there errors creep in but they are minor." Reviews from the same source acclaim their joint Encyclopedia of Military History as "A massive, authoritative, and useable encyclopedia of military history that is ideal for college libraries," and, "To record world military history for the last 5,000 years would appear to be an impossible task; the authors, however, have succeeded surprisingly well."

Critiques of T. N. Dupuy's individual efforts are generally less flattering. Although regarded as "one of the nation's most eminent military historians" (7:261), his writings are often criticized for their generalizations and lack of detailed analysis and support. In assessing his Almanac of World Military Power, a 1978 Book Review Digest extract states, "the deficiencies of the work as a whole seriously impair its value." Reviews of A Genius For War are nearly as critical. The following extracts from the 1978 issue of Book Review Digest are typical of the comments found in reviews of this work: "A Genius For War left this reviewer unimpressed. The style is ponderous and confusing at times," and, "Dupuy's book does not fulfill its promise, when it does focus on its thesis, it is virtually submerged by campaign narratives. The reader never learns exactly how the German Army fostered the professional and personal relationships that kept the rank and file following these officers; or how Germany sustained its technical mastery of the craft of war."

It is this author's conclusion that even though T. N. Dupuy's books make interesting reading for military history buffs, they often lack the detailed analysis and support normally associated with serious studies.

Until a very late stage of the war, the commanders of British and American ground forces knew all too well that, in a confrontation with German troops on anything approaching equal terms, their own men were likely to be soundly defeated. Only when they had complete command of the air, a crushing numerical superiority, overwhelming artillery support, and, as is now becoming known, the exceptional insight into the enemy's military position provided by [the decoding of messages through] 'Ultra,' were Allied generals able to give a reasonable assurance of success. Every Allied soldier involved in fighting the Germans knew that this was so and did not regard it in anyway humiliating (4:436).

Given this German military excellence at the operational and tactical level, is Dupuy correct in attributing it to one institution--the General Staff? Dupuy identifies five possible reasons for German military excellence: genetic superiority, inherent adaptability to military life, desperation at the prospect of defeat, a cultural pattern giving dominance to military activity, and the development of more effective military institutions than other countries (2:7-11; 4:436). Dupuy dismisses the first four as being without basis and settles on the fifth--the General Staff--as the explanation for German military excellence. Dupuy's book then strives to demonstrate how the competence of the General Staff system contributed to the effective performance of the German Army. The fourth factor, which Dupuy unfortunately dismisses, may have as much to do with explaining German military excellence, as does the institution upon which Dupuy bases his thesis. Michael Howard, in discussing the important works of behavioral psychologists and sociologists, writes, "Unless one discounts the studies of Demeter and Ritter (which Dupuy cites with approval) as well as the entire school of Max Weber (which he ignores) the reader is bound to wonder why in this work he so explicitly denies it (cultural factors)" (4:437).

Compared to our own society, the German soldier has traditionally enjoyed an unusually high level of status and prestige within the community--particularly in the Officer Corps. This status, as Dupuy points out, has historically led to widespread acceptance of military service as traditional duty. These same attitudes and values not only contributed to overall German military excellence but also inspired the institution Dupuy credits with "institutionalizing excellence." Given these fundamental characteristics and values inherent within German society, it seems unrealistic to attribute German military excellence solely to the General Staff system. The German officer has certainly not always been representative of German society as Dupuy claims. In contrast to Dupuy's assertion that, following World War I, the Army remained "the one solid element around which a new nation might be constructed" (2:181), Rosinski writes, "The disassociation of the Army leaders from the life and outlook of the civilian population in the end was to prove the

Walter Goerlitz, in his History of the German General Staff, discusses Moltke's reaction to a dispatch received by the German Emperor in the crucial days before the war. The dispatch indicated England was prepared to "guarantee French neutrality against a German assurance that no hostile acts would be undertaken against France" (3:155). In front of Moltke and the Prussian War Minister, General von Falkenhayn, the Emperor declared, "Well, now we'll simply march our whole Army against Russia." Moltke was horrified. The deployment of an army of millions was not a thing that could be improvised; such things took years to prepare. The Emperor remarked, "Your uncle would have given me a different answer" (3:155). Thus, the inflexibility of Moltke, a direct product of Dupuy's "institution of excellence"--The German General Staff--assured Germany's involvement in a two-front war she could not win.

Dupuy presents a credible narrative of the war years--of the failed assault resulting from the "watering-down" and poor execution of the Schlieffen Plan (which in itself must bring into question German excellence) and of the stalemate that followed. Dupuy presents some rather convincing statistics as he strives to support his thesis of "institutionalized military excellence." The extremely favorable German kill-ratios over the "Allies" presented by Dupuy and discussed in Chapter One become less impressive upon closer examination. The large German advantage in kill-ratio during this war, as it would be again in World War II, was on the Russian front. Nevertheless, the Germans did retain a slight kill-ratio advantage in the West. In fact, statistical analysis reveals German troops were, on the average, 20 to 30 percent more "combat-effective" than their adversaries on the Western Front and often five-to-fifteen times more effective than the Russians in both world wars (2:1-5). During World War I, however, the initial advantages the Germans held in discipline and training were lost as the early offensives settled into the quagmire of trench warfare.

The General Staff was responsible for coordinating strategy for the employment of all air, land, and naval forces during the First World War. Dupuy fails to stress the tragic consequences of Germany's strategy of unrestricted submarine warfare which was intended to knock Britain out, but instead brought the United States into the war (5:21). This strategic miscalculation brought additional men, equipment, and logistical support to the war. These additional resources, provided by the United States, made the situation on the Western Front hopeless for Germany by 1918. Dupuy tends to skim over or address with some reluctance German strategic failures, like the ones discussed above, while preferring to focus instead on German operational and tactical successes.

"The General Staff's meddling in internal politics (both during and following the First World War) which served only to weaken further the political leadership of the state" (5:21) is

could have, or perhaps should have, played in keeping Hitler from power or in controlling him later is in itself the basis for further extensive study. However, given the general feeling in our own society that the military should remain an apolitical institution subordinate to the state, one can understand Dupuy's logic--while disagreeing with his conclusions on the role of the Army in Hitler's rise to power. Even though the majority of General Staff Officers stayed out of politics and devoted themselves to military questions, a few officers such as Schleicher (who briefly served as Chancellor) and others in the Reichswehr Ministry worked hard at establishing political influence which would enable them to influence military policy (5:53-54). Blomberg, another ambitious staff officer and rival of Schleicher, was eventually rewarded for his support of Hitler by his appointment as Defense Minister (5:53-54).

Dupuy's conclusion that much of the power and prestige of the General Staff was lost during the reorganization of 1938 is accurate. The reorganization placed the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force under the High Command of the Armed Forces (OKW) with Hitler as Supreme Commander. The General Staff remained under the High Command of the Army (OKH) with the Chief of the General Staff (Beck) reporting to the Commander-in-Chief of the Army (2:244-245). Blomberg responded to Beck's opposition to the new structure with: "To regard the position of the Chief of the General Staff as comparable to that held by Moltke or Schleiffen is a gross exaggeration which no longer corresponds to the realities of the times" (5:57). Subsequent events were to show that the OKW would serve as nothing more than a military secretariat--with Hitler making the policy and grand strategic decisions (5:58).

In his narrative of this period, Dupuy relieves the General Staff of responsibility for the terrible strategic miscalculations that were to follow. He blames the strategic failures on Hitler while rendering praise on the General Staff for its operational and tactical successes. Such analysis, while perhaps accurate in a general sense, distracts the reader from the truth. Closer examination reveals that Hitler's initiative, as much as General Staff expertise, was responsible for the early successes enjoyed by the Third Reich (5:64-65). Hitler often made operational decisions without the advice of the General Staff. He became convinced, after disagreements with Beck over plans to attack Czechoslovakia, that, "vigour of spirit was lacking in the general staff officers" (5:70). Beck was subsequently relieved and the "relations between Hitler and the General Staff never recovered from the crisis of confidence caused by Beck" (5:70). While observations such as these can divorce the General Staff from the responsibility for Germany's strategic failures, they also bring into question the wisdom of attributing to it, almost solely, credit for its successes. During World War II, Hitler listened more readily to a close circle of advisors--thus the role of the Chief of the General Staff was very different from

to recognize some of its limitations. An effort was made to present some of those limitations in this chapter. While it is true Hitler stifled much of the initiative characteristic of General Staff Officers, the institution itself must share the blame for the failures in strategic planning that Germany committed in World War II, and for the terrible defeat that followed.

In assessing A Genius For War, this chapter has focused primarily on inconsistencies and inaccuracies in Dupuy's work. Such a focus, while useful in identifying deficiencies and assessing objectivity, can present an imbalanced picture of the text. The concluding chapter strives to balance that picture by assessing the overall merit of the book as a history of the German Army and General Staff. The chapter also offers a final assessment of Dupuy's explanation for German military excellence and speculates on the potential value of adapting the system to our own Army.

excellence by simply adapting an institution to our own military--for the excellence is inherent, at least to some degree, in the behavior patterns of the individuals within the society from which that institution evolved. The German behavior patterns made the individual German unusually adaptable to the military and efficient in the execution of his duties. Even if we wanted to recreate aspects of German culture within our own society, it would obviously be impossible; therefore, such observations, necessarily, remain hypothetical. Despite the difficulty in answering this question and in assessing complex cultural factors, their contribution to German military excellence remains too significant to ignore.

In summary, Dupuy's book, although interesting, fails in its attempt to explain the complex dilemma of German military excellence. By attributing 150 years of behavior and military history to one institution--the German General Staff--Dupuy settles on a thesis that is only partially accurate at best. Nevertheless, A Genius For War, with its excellent descriptions of German campaign plans and tactics, remains enjoyable reading for students of military history and history buffs alike.

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